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September (1933) two out of four women were too tired to cook properly on three days out of twenty and one on four days. Most of the housewives in the village failed to cook on one day. In this case there was the apparently extraordinary situation of women with granaries full of food failing to prepare their families a proper meal. In this particular case four housewives, all elderly women, whom I observed particularly, seemed to succumb, apparently quite unnecessarily, to a kind of lethargy. Whether this was from insufficient food, too hard work the day previous, or an absence of relish to cook with their porridge I do not know, but these women sat still most of the morning talking or doing odd jobs in a desultory kind of way. In the evening they still had not started to grind. I asked, 'Why aren't you cooking?' They said with a shrug, 'There is no relish.' 'Why didn't you go and fetch some?' 'Hunger, Madam! Our strength has given out.' (*Nsala, Mukwai! Maka yapwa!*) They were, in fact, sitting hungry with millet in their granaries and relish to be found in the bush. This is the kind of situation that puzzles the European, who feels certain that with a little more effort the native woman could use her resources to better effect. As a matter of fact, her catering usually becomes less intelligent when she is hungry or exhausted, rather than more so. Necessity, in fact, is not the mother of invention where a shortage of food is concerned, and I have several times seen Bemba react to similar domestic difficulties with the same kind of coma of resignation, when it seemed to me, at any rate, that a little extra push of energy would have solved the problem. The explanation of such incidents is probably partly physiological, and partly also the fact, already stressed, that a people accustomed from infancy to an irregular diet do not feel sufficiently indignant or surprised at missing a proper meal to resist such an event energetically.

Such a break-down of the working arrangements of a Bemba family are rare, but it is a fact that the combination of domestic work with gardening and looking for relish is difficult at certain seasons of the year, and that the food-supply of different households tends to vary with the amount of labour available.

Education in Housecraft.

I never heard a small girl given definite instruction in any branch of housecraft. Children sit endlessly watching the different

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868 technical activities of their elders, apparently without ever asking questions or passing comments. They are not strenuously encouraged, as are our children, to learn any particular process, whether cooking or gardening. Of a child who showed no particular inclination to take part in any activity, or refused to do a job asked of it, I have heard mothers remark tolerantly that the little girl had not yet got sense (*takwata mano*) and then give up the attempt. In any skilled process like pot-making, the girl who shows promise at the first try is encouraged to go on, but one less successful is not induced to make another effort. 'She hasn't got sense', would again be a typical comment. Thus learning is a very gradual process among the Bemba with little drive or competitive spirit.

857 868 Children practise housecraft among themselves. Little girls of 5 and 6 dig holes in the ground, and sit opposite each other with imitation pestles making believe to pound grain. They carry tiny bundles of firewood and pretend to cook. In fact these are among their few make-believe games. When slightly older they beg for scraps of food, and go to the outskirts of the village where they make small huts of grass and here 'play at houses', cooking on small fire-stands in old pots or cast-off tins. This is a more elaborate game in which small boys pair off with small girls as married pairs. Later, at about 10 or 11, the girls form a community of their own, a bigger girl 'marrying' a smaller one and keeping permanently with her.[1] At this time the girls often make fire-stands on their mothers' verandas and cook more seriously, serving up the meal to friends or even elders. But in every case it is not the parents who are instructing, but the older child the younger. This is also true of the process of learning the different kinds of edible mushrooms or the wild spinaches in the bush.

868 By 13 or 14 a girl can cook all the usual dishes. There may be a difference to the enthusiast between one lump of *bwali* and another, and Bemba husbands declare emphatically that this is so, but to make fine smooth porridge is a matter of care, not of learning a complicated technical process, nor can the cooking of relish be considered difficult. The brewing of beer is never attempted by younger girls.

Just before marriage, at 14 or 15, I noticed the elder girls become casual and disinclined to help either in the house or

[1] I have only notes on this point from one village.

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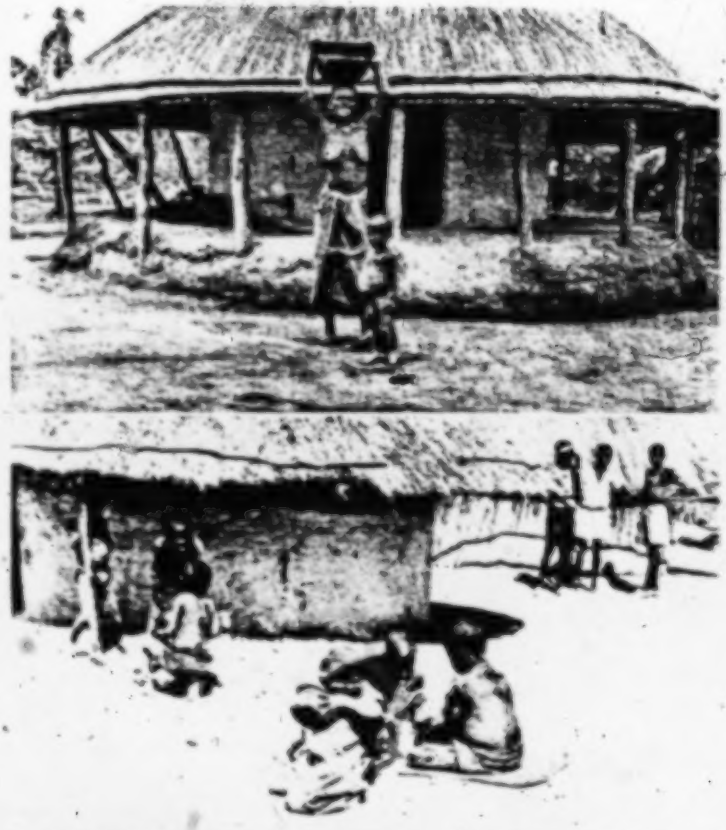

Fetching water for the kitchen.
First steps in cooking.
Grinding the daily flour.

[facing p. 106]

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garden. It seemed as if they were no longer interested in the work carried out quite eagerly by the younger children, but were absorbed with the problem of their coming marriages and the beginning of housekeeping on their own. This fact adds significance to many aspects of the initiation rite (*icisungu*) which followed the attainment of puberty in the old days and still does in some villages. Many of its ceremonies give mimetic representations of cooking and housecraft, and some of the pottery images (*mbusa*) made for the occasions represent the housewife's duties symbolically. These parts of the ritual are all described as 'teaching the girl to cook'. As we have seen, she knows how to cook already, but this ceremony seems to have the function of impressing on the initiate the legal duties she is assuming at marriage. 'When she had not been initiated,' a woman explained to me, 'if she dawdled on the way to fetch water, or refused to grind for her mother, it did not matter. When she is married she must hurry if her husband calls.' This seems to show that the Bemba distinguish between the actual learning of a technical process and the impressing of a traditional attitude of mind towards a duty.

The real difficulty of housecraft is the organization of time and labour, the calculation of quantities by a system which depends entirely on empirical judgements, and, as we shall see, a knowledge of the rules of hospitality and the dues of different kinsmen. All these the girl learns to practise by working both before and after marriage, as a member of a large group directly under the orders of her mother; this cooking team will now be described.

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252 476 in the future. Is there any advantage, economic or otherwise, in this particular system of joint labour? To share food from the same dish is certainly more economical than preparing separate portions. There is always enough, the Bemba women say, if you eat out of one basket.[1] This is ensured by the custom of grouping of men and of women and children at meals.

Again, it must be recognized that joint housekeeping makes for greater security in a society with no system of exchange or purchase of food. To be attached to a 'big house' is to share its fortunes—to have the chance of delicacies like beer and meat as often as possible, and to be certain of support in case of a shortage. A comparison between conditions in a modern village where the kinship groups are smaller (p. 153) makes this clear. Where the unit of consumption is only one or two households the people may be better off at good seasons of the year but practically destitute in a bad one.

Joint cooking also eases the housewife's labour very largely. The younger women, in particular, like grinding and pounding together, and seem to work with greater enthusiasm in this way. The difficulties of combining lengthy cooking processes with gardening have already been described (Chap. VI and VIII). The woman with several young girls to help her may be able to work in her husband's fields and yet be able to provide relish for the evening meal. The isolated housewife may not, and the notes given on typical families (Chap. X) show this fact concretely.

252 476 869 Lastly, we saw that the Bemba system of education provides for no direct instruction in housecraft or a knowledge of the lore of the bush, but this information is acquired by a process of imitation through membership of a large group. Matrilocal marriage means that the girl is under the orders of her mother both before and after marriage for many years and thus learns the arts of organization, leadership, and the management of supplies by slow degrees. This seemed to me not the least important function of the matrilocal cooking team.

Domestic Economics in Modern Marriages.

583 591 178 The partial break-down of the matrilocal family system has had pronounced effects on the whole domestic economy of the Bemba.

[1] It will be seen (pp. 139, 41, 70) how housewives give their kinswomen grain to grind when food is plentiful, a small portion of flour when it is less so, and an invitation to share their dish when it is really scarce.

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Thus though the demands of near relatives are imperative, part of the art of good housekeeping consists in knowing where to draw the line without giving offence, and in successfully appraising the respective claims of different kinsmen, and it is this art which Bemba girls only acquire slowly by dint of joint co-operation in their mother's team.

Methods of Measurement.

Besides the means by which she satisfies her kinship obligations it is important to consider the actual methods by which quantities are measured in this community and hence how the needs of the year are estimated. The householder's powers of calculating her assets depend on the system of numeration used in this particular culture, the material apparatus for measuring, and last but not least, the incentives the people have to estimate the quantities of their supplies. In short, can the Bemba count, and do they consider it necessary to do so? The difference is of considerable importance practically. European systems of commensuration are so exact that a woman could reckon the daily intake of each member of her family with the accuracy of a laboratory feeding experiment, if she wanted to do so. But we know that in fact the planning of weekly food-supplies varies according to class and locality in every possible way, from the family with a large regular income that can buy large quantities of stores at a time and reckons to use similar amounts of different commodities each week, to those living under more precarious conditions that customarily drink beer on a Saturday evening, eat a large meat meal on Sunday, and exist for the rest of the week as best they can, running out for extra groceries as long as the money lasts. Among the Bemba the power of calculating quantities is far less exact, and the incentive to estimate nutritional needs precisely is even less than in our own community.

The Bemba system of numerals is very similar to that employed by the other Bantu peoples—that is to say numbers up to ten are expressed by words and the use of the fingers arranged in a series of different positions, increase in quantity being emphasized by a rising tone of the voice. The four fingers are used in counting with the thumb folded in to the centre of the hand. Thus the index finger raised alone on the right hand means one, the index and second fingers joined means two, the third finger raised with

3: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1956
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The Interpretation of the Ceremony

881 puberty ceremonies in Central Africa contain such phrases as 'the girls are then given *instruction* in sex and motherhood'. It is therefore important to ask ourselves at the outset the sense in which the Bemba are here using the word 'teach'.

I must admit that their emphasis on this function of the chisungu and their use of the word *ukufunda*, which they now commonly employ for European school teaching, at first misled me. Even after fairly wide comparative reading on the subject I began to imagine that the candidates had at least some direct instruction on some subject or other at some time during the ceremony. I confess to a mental picture of the girls sitting in the initiation hut and listening to talks from an old woman on what might be called in modern idiom 'marriage guidance'.

I doubt whether any such direct instruction took place during the chisungu I witnessed, or indeed in any other such rite. The time free for such teaching was very small. Added to this the girls were usually shoved away in the corner of the initiation hut and sometimes given direct orders not to look at what was going on. Their heads were, more often than not, closely wrapped under thick blankets. I never heard any part of the ceremony explained. If any useful information was handed out during the chisungu one would be inclined to think that the candidates themselves would be the last people to have a chance of acquiring it. The women said they were teaching them 'the things of womanhood' and also 'things of the gardens'. In other words, how to bear and bring up children, to cook, act as housewife, and garden, and we saw that rites representing hoeing, sowing, cooking, gathering fire-wood and the distributing of food occurred throughout the ceremony.

881 But instruction, in the European sense, was quite unnecessary in
868 such subjects. Bemba girls play at cooking as soon as they can stand, and they help their mothers in the house most of the day. They go with the older women to garden and also learn from them how to look for mushrooms and wild spinaches. Moreover, the more complex aspects of housekeeping such as the care of the granary and the reaping of the grain are not entrusted to the girl until some years after marriage. That is to say the chisungu rite

881 neither gives additional knowledge or skill nor the right to use it.
864 In the same way, Bemba girls are not ignorant of the nature of sex

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since many of them have been given to their husbands before puberty and some form of intercourse, usually incomplete, has taken place. They have also acted as nurses of their young brothers and sisters to an extent that is rare in most sections of our society, and they are therefore familiar with the elements of the rather simple system of child care practised in this tribe.

What then do the Bemba girls learn in their chisungu or in what sense can they be said to learn?

First of all they learn a secret language or rather, secret terms. The different *mbusa* have names supposedly, at any rate, known only to initiated women. For instance I was taken some way into the bush to be told with every precaution to ensure secrecy that 'we women' call whitewash *lota*, an archaic term, instead of *pemba*, the more common word. Girls also learn the chisungu songs. The doggerel rhymes associated with the *mbusa* (see Appendix B) are some of them widely sung, but they have a number of secret or semi-secret meanings apart from the overt one. What seems to the educationist to be the most mumbo-jumbo and useless aspect of the whole affair may actually constitute one of the most prized items of information to the people concerned.

Girls are also said to learn the secret language of marriage. The Bemba language abounds in phraseology with hidden or allusive meaning. It is part and parcel of court etiquette and it is used in other special social relationships and in particular between husband and wife. 'We married people' said a male informant 'know how to say things that a young boy and girl would not understand. That is what we want a girl to learn at her chisungu'. The intimacy that surrounds the physical relation of husband and wife, described as 'the secret things within the house' seems to the European to be curious in view of the lack of other forms of intimate companionship between them, but it is evident that it is the special phraseology and the taboos of married life that a man hopes his wife will learn in the chisungu. The candidates also have to learn the rather complex sequence of the rites themselves which represents a considerable effort of memory in communities without a written language.

Nor does it matter if the girl herself does not see the whole of the ceremony which is performed over her. It is a form of education

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that is recognized to be cumulative. A girl may have little intellectual understanding of what is being done at the time of her chisungu, although she may be in a highly emotional state in which she is likely to be suggestible to the general emphasis laid on the importance of marriage and childbirth. Next year however she will act as a young helper of the *nacimbusa* and so her knowledge will grow. As one old *nacimbusa* put it 'If she has seen two ceremonies, or three, a girl will come to me and say "Tell me about the crocodile". She remembers and then she comes and asks me again "Tell me some more about the crocodile" and I tell her more. But other girls have no ears. They do not ask anything. They just say "Let it be, those are things of the chisungu" '. In other words, clever girls begin to memorize and get more and more knowledge of the deeper associations of the symbols and these girls probably become specialist *banacimbusa* as they grow older. The others, no doubt, give up when they find they cannot master the intricacies of the ceremonial.[1]

Secondly the chisungu teaches, not the technical activities of the wife, mother and housewife, but the socially approved attitude towards them. The women themselves see this point and, in fact, made it to me. An intelligent *nacimbusa* will admit that the girls know how to cook and grind but will say that after her chisungu a young girl does her work in a different way. Such women explain that, when young, a girl can idle in the gardens if she likes and her mother will shrug her shoulders and say 'She is not grown up'; but when she is married, she cannot refuse her duties or it will be a cause of divorce. Husbands will scold a lazy wife and this will bring shame on her family. As one woman put it: 'Before, if they were called to work they could go slowly. Now they have to run.' In other words, the girl is told that she has to do things with a new spirit and a new sense of responsibility. The rite not only consecrates the woman's duties in the sense of making them seem honourable, but it is an occasion for the public affirmation of the legal obligations of the marriage. There are pottery emblems associated with most of the duties of bride and bride-

[1] The Kriges point out that a Lovedu girl is only considered properly initiated when she has witnessed the ceremonies six times. Cf. *The Realm of a Rain Queen*, 1943.